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ABSTRACT

The elementary program for gifted and talented students in Willingboro, New Jersey, is called the Program for Academically Talented Students (PATS) and is in its third year of operation. The program is administered by the supervisor of reading/language arts and is taught by each of the ten building reading specialists who received special training through inservice programs. Nearly six percent of the students in grades four through six participate. Eligible fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students meet with the reading teacher for approximately two hours per week. Emphasis is on the process skills of critical, evaluative, and creative thinking and many self-directed learning projects are included. The needs of the gifted and talented students at the middle and high school levels in the district are met through an acceleration program in the following major subject areas: mathematics, science, social studies, English, and foreign languages. Students for programs at all levels are selected if they meet two of the following criteria: (1) An IQ of at least 130, (2) a 95% ranking on a standardized achievement test in the areas of math or reading, (3) an above grade level placement in reading or mathematics, and (4) teacher recommendation by completion of Renzulli's Scale for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students. (MKM)

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PROGRAM FOR ACADEMICALLY TALENTED STUDENTS
Willingboro, New Jersey

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Introduction

The elementary program for gifted and talented students in Willingboro, New Jersey is known by its acronym, P.A.T.S. - Program for Academically Talented Students, and is in its third year of operation. The program is administered by the Supervisor of Reading/Language Arts in cooperation with the Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent. Each of the ten building reading specialists are responsible for instruction. It has received a commendation from the N. J. State Department of Education according to our state's plan for a Thorough and Efficient Education for all students.

The initial goal of the program was to instruct academically talented students in grades four to six. Because we have art, music and physical education specialists in each of our elementary schools, it was decided to focus only upon the academic needs of the identified children.

District Description

Willingboro as a community is now twenty years old. It was originally upper middle class and now its composition could best be described as "middle-middle" class. The upper segment has been replaced by lower class, for the most part. There are still many professional persons living in the town, since Philadelphia and its many colleges is a scant seventeen miles away.

Our elementary school population is presently 5,197. Each elementary school has a reading specialist whose responsibilities include:

(1) managing the tri-basal developmental reading program

(2) articulating all supplemental reading programs

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(3) instructing students in PATS

There is also a full-time compensatory education reading teacher in each elementary building.

At the middle school, grades 7 and 8, there is a staff of 17 reading teachers who conduct the remedial, compensatory education, and developmental programs. There are approximately 1,620 students in the middle school.

The two high schools, grades 9-12, with a population of approximately 3,483 students, have a staff of seven reading teachers who work with those students identified as below state minimum competency standards.

There is also an "alternate school" for those students who do not succeed socially or academically in a traditional environment. A full-time reading specialist works with approximately one half of the 53 students in that program.

The needs of the gifted and talented students at the middle and high school levels are met through an acceleration program. The criteria for selection is the same as at the elementary level, with emphasis on teacher judgment.

Accelerated courses are offered to all identified students in grades 7-12 in the following major subject areas: mathematics, science, social studies, English, and foreign language.

Math
7 - Advanced Math
8 - Algebra
9 - Geometry
10 - Algebra II
11 - Trigonometry, Solid Geometry
12 - Calculus

English
7, 8 - Advanced
9-12 - Honors

(Enrichment and increased intensity as compared to College Prep or, of course, Careers)

Science
8 - Introduction to Physical Science
9 - Biological Sciences Curriculum Study
10 - Advanced Chemistry
11 - Advanced Physics
12 - Advanced Placement Science (Any area)

Social Studies
11,12 - European Advanced Placement

Foreign Language
Levels 5, 6 - Literature and Culture

Identification of Students

For many districts, identification of the truly gifted student has been a thorny issue. Willingboro chose not to include the parents in this phase of the program development. Parents are involved in curriculum suggestions and other school activities. The criteria for selecting students into the PATS Program is as follows:

1. IQ 130+ - any standardized test, any year, verbal or non-verbal intelligence quotient.
2. 95% + ranking on any achievement test in the areas of total reading or total mathematics, any year.
3. An above grade level placement in reading and/or superior mathematics achievement (determined by final grade of A for the two preceding years).
4. Teacher recommendation by the completion of Renzulli's Scale for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students.

A student is eligible for the program if he/she meets at least two of the above criteria.

Identification of Teachers

The decision of who was going to teach the program was difficult to make. There were many interested classroom teachers, some who had some special courses for the gifted. Several plans were suggested and the following two were the final proposals:

1. to have five reading specialists become full-time PATS teachers and service two schools each while the remaining five would continue their responsibilities for the tri-basal developmental reading program.
2. to allow the ten reading specialists to remain in each of their buildings continuing present responsibilities half-time, and to be responsible for PATS instruction half-time.

The latter plan of organization was accepted and implemented primarily because it was felt that the reading specialist could better meet the needs of both the developmental and PATS Program if they remained in the building where they were most familiar with the teachers and students.

This decision had budgetary blessings as well since the majority of personnel needed was already there and only one additional staff member was needed to implement a program for over 300 students. This additional teacher handles the "overflow" students in a pull-out bussed program in our newest elementary building.

One summer and a half school term was used to prepare the reading specialists to perform their new responsibilities. This in-service program included the following activities:

1. Visitation to other school districts' gifted and talented programs
2. Attendance at workshops at our intermediate units called Educational Improvement Centers (EIC's) in New Jersey
3. Attendance at other state and regional sponsored meetings and workshops (Example: 3 day Regional Workshop in Atlantic City)
4. Review of the research and literature on the gifted and talented

During our visits to schools with existing programs we were warned of three major problems in implementing a gifted program:

1. Much in-service is needed for the classroom teacher to fully understand the needs of gifted students.

2. A close articulation is needed between the PATS teachers and the classroom teachers.

3. Do not let the "teacher become the program."

Program

There are 306 identified and participating PATS students in grades 4 - 6. This proportion of nearly six percent is slightly higher than the five percent usually quoted.

(Reminder: Criteria for selection and academically talented - not only gifted students)

The program is traditional in many respects. It is essentially a pull-out program for all eligible 4th, 5th, and 6th graders who meet with their PATS teacher for approximately one and a half to two hours per week.

The goals of the program are for students to acquire and refine the process skills of:

1. problem definition and formulation of alternative solutions
2. critical and evaluative thinking skills which focus on the "why" behind events or opinions
3. exposure to resource and retreival techniques
4. establishment of individual student self-discipline leading to individual learning projects

We call our program a process-product oriented program. We think of our students as creators and producers of knowledge. Emphasis is on utilizing the commonly defined reading skills of critical thinking, composition and study skills. From the program's inception, its teachers realized that although most or all gifted students possessed marvelous oral fluency, they also had common needs for instruction in writing fluency, study skills improvement, and reading-thinking organization.

Two additional themes or goals are prevalent:

1. the resource room concept

2. identification and use of local professionals as mentors

Mentors have been used as guest speakers and individual student interviewees. These speakers have developed career goal awareness as well as providing important role models for emulation. An architect, an award-winning news reporter, and a photographer have been student favorites.

A large variety of materials are available for teacher and student use. Each teacher has a wide latitude as to the ways these materials are most effective for their use. The use of the lecture is greatly discouraged. Open discussions are encouraged. We have found that the most successful teacher is that one who has an open mind and creates a classroom atmosphere in which she becomes a learner as well as a teacher.

We have also discovered that the most successful teachers are those who offer a variety of methods for the students to meet their individual goals. She also does not allow a few students to monopolize discussions.

It is also important for the students to have an open-mind and be willing to learn from each other. Truly gifted students tend to be pedantic and focus on a particular topic or interest. This is fine, but it is the teacher's responsibility to broaden these interests and guide these students in their particular interests.

(Example - Indians)

A special report card has been designed for reporting PATS students' progress.

The classroom teacher's support is crucial to the gifted teacher, when operating a pull-out program. The timing of release periods, operation of a resource room, and program interruptions dues to special testing or assemblies all require rapport and flexibility between the two teachers. The classroom teacher can be utilized

as a "guide on the side", or "sage on the stage", also, for academic areas and and activities which would be suitable for the gifted students. It is important not to replicate the regular classroom program but rather enhance and enrich it.

Showcasing

I have described the background and framework of the Willingboro PATS program. It is traditional. However, now I would like to enthuse about the aspects which have made the program exciting.

We have motivated students to become creators and producers of knowledge by "grabbing them with activity." Many of these activities have been self-directed learning projects which is an adult education concept, currently.

Action oriented projects which have been particularly successful in Willingboro are:

- A "Link from Spink" puppet show which was patterned on the "Mork and Mindy" television show. The script was created by brainstorming. All students were involved in the production; either in hand puppet construction, painting background scenery on a roll, taping sound effects, or acting. (A tip: 5 pages approximates 15 minutes of show time.)
- Creative writing books were authored utilizing first and second grade word lists. These books were hand bound and represented to the respective classroom libraries.
- A justice unit was created. including researching the process of jury selection, civil vs. criminal court systems, current cases in the news, and a culminating trip to a courtroom.
- A Junior Great Books Club was established where students read thematically each week. Topics included inventions, sports, autobiographies, animals, mythology, and others. Students met weekly for an in-school brunch and oral reporting. The students took notes on these oral book

reports and now have bibliographies of peer-recommended books for future school years. In addition, the group requested speed reading techniques and vocabulary enrichment activities.

- A science project: "The Planets" utilized cross-grade pairing of students who travelled by spaceship to all the planets and created learning stations in their school library. These stations featured art work emphasizing distinctive features and tape recorded logs of their trips.
- Field trips have been important in "expanding the walls of the gifted classroom." Students have visited opera rehearsals, a metropolitan newspaper operation, and several other arenas of interest. Students plan to create a mentor and field trip possibilities' resource book.
- Additional highlights of successes would have to include poetry memorization, poetry contests, debates, creating a family coat of arms, brainstorming what to do to help the Iranian hostages, choral reading, and profiles which were wallpaper mosaic tiled creations of the thoughts books create in our minds.

Recently I visited one of our schools and saw a bulletin board in a PATS room which had as its title, "Reading Colors Your Mind." When I complemented the teacher about the display, she said, "Teaching PATS or gifted students 'colored' my mind,also. I will never be the same."

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